

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL
DAVID KENNEDY, COMMANDER, 2-3 BRIGADE TROOPS BATTALION, 2ND BRIGADE
COMBAT TEAM, 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME:
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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): On the line with us
this morning, Lieutenant Colonel David Kennedy, who's the commander of the 2-3 Brigade Troops
Battalion, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

Colonel Kennedy, thank you for being with us, and welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable. Do
you have an opening statement for us this morning, sir?

COL. KENNEDY: Yeah, I sure do. First let me thank you, and good morning to the panel.
And thank you for taking time to participate in the discussion this morning. After this brief
opening statement, I'd be more than happy to answer any of your questions.

We continue to see incredible improvement throughout our Brigade Combat Team AO, AO
Spartan, here in the southern Baghdad belt. We arrived here back in June. When we first got
here, our AO was considered an enemy stronghold and was one of the major thoroughfares for
accelerants into Baghdad. Since our Brigade Combat Team has been so successful in securing
major portions of Arab Jabour, Abu Waitha and Hawr Rajab, it's given us the opportunity to engage
the local population with our non-lethal efforts.

We received the initial three civilian members of our embedded Provincial Reconstruction
Team a few months ago. We have a -- our team leader is Mr. John Smith. He's a State Department
employee. We also have a USDA rep and an (AID/aid ?) rep, as well, and they've been a big help
to us as subject matter experts.

We've had great success in working with GOI officials at both the qadha and nahiya levels in
getting them heavily involved in repairing their own infrastructure.

We're also seeing strong results with our economic development program. What we've found
is just a small injection of capital into many of the small businesses in our AO has yielded

immediate results in many of the shops and merchants. We're also beginning to see progress with some of our local councils well in the governance front, and they're forming subcommittees, attending training sessions and getting representation within the official GOI structure.

This is my second tour in this same AO; a previous tour I was a brigade transition team chief with the national police, and I'm amazed at the progress I've seen in this predominantly Sunni area that we work in.

So with that, I'm more than happy to take your questions.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir.

Andrew Lubin, you are first on-line. Why don't you get us started?

Q Colonel, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin here from the Military Observer. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us today.

Sir --

COL. KENNEDY: Thank you. Go ahead, sir.

Q Great. Thanks. Yeah, I wanted to ask you, one, about the PRT program. You're in a predominantly agricultural region. What kind of jobs are you trying to start and what are you bringing in, because with the shopkeepers -- they're only as good as the customers they have. So what are you doing to get the circulation of money up in the area again?

COL. KENNEDY: Well, you're right. In terms of the shopkeepers, we can provide them a quick infusion of cash, and this helps them to increase their stockage of their produce and whatnot. Some of them have, you know, ideas for expansion, where they can hire employees, but longer term it'll be about job training. We have a votech in our area over in Rashid. And then we're also forming public works battalions, and that's going to be one of the linchpins as we transition the concerned local citizens away from the security lieu and more into public works-type organizations.

Q This sounds like you're kind of recreating on a smaller scale Franklin Roosevelt's old CCC programs out of the '30s.

COL. KENNEDY: Well, I'm not too familiar with that. I know a lot of what we're doing is modeled in the -- what has worked elsewhere, specifically out in Anbar province. So what we do is we try to apply a lot of the lessons learned from areas that are a little further along than we are, say, six to nine months further down the road with the CLCs, and use what's worked for them.

Q No, I mean the comment about the TVA and that whole set of programs is you put people to work and you build infrastructure and get jobs going at the same time. It was a very positive program.

COL. KENNEDY: Yeah, that does sound very similar.

Q Are you still doing -- in Anbar, they give out the \$2,500 kind of grants, where they walk in there and, you know, help a guy build a store and stock it for them. Are you doing that in your AO also?

COL. KENNEDY: Yeah, those are called microgrants, and we use our CERP, our Commanders Emergency Response Program, funds to do that. So far, we've distributed 57 of them, ranging in the 400 to \$2,500 range, I think, 87,000 so far. I go into all of our areas at least once a week, and that's one of the big things I do, is distribute those microgrants and also assess how the businesses are doing.

We also try to link a training program with that, and then we reinforce success. If we see that a business is using their money prudently and they're making a lot of improvements, then we'll give them another one. We don't want this to just be, you know, a cash grab. They have to actually show us how they're improving their business, and I've got some great examples. I'll start out with one here.

I don't know if you're familiar with the butcher of Arab Jabour. He's the guy that President Bush mentioned in a speech a few, I guess, about a month ago down in South Carolina. And this guy -- I see him every week, and we gave him just a small microgrant, I think, \$2,000. And he's completely rebuilt an entirely new shop next to his existing one. He's got a new butcher table, which we actually purchased for him over in a neighboring town -- (inaudible) -- trying to stimulate his shop as well, brought it over to him. So now, you know, his old rusty, filthy table, which he used to slaughter sheep and cows on -- he's got a brand new one.

But this guy also has a vision. I spent about a half hour with him on Wednesday, and his vision is to build a restaurant, and he wants to hire about 15 locals from there in Arab Jabour. So myself and the PRT team leader, we've made it one of our goals to eat dinner there before we go home this summer, so hopefully we can make that a reality. Q If you could get us some pictures of that, Colonel, that would be spectacular, that circulation of money, and get the people liking the coalition. That would be tremendous.

COL. KENNEDY: Yeah, I'm sure we can follow up with that.

Q Good. Thanks. That would be ideal.

MR. HOLT: Jarred?

Q Yes, sir. Thank you.

Could you talk a little bit about the institutionalization of the interrelationships which are being built? Obviously, we're seeing tremendous progress in the security aspect, but as you're kind of touching on, give us some more flavor on the local level about the imams, the sheikhs, the government, the federal government, the qadha, the civil government, how everybody is starting to try to work together and how we're going to actually institutionalize this so that as we leave, things don't just fall apart.

COL. KENNEDY: Well, what I can tell you is -- let me talk about the people I work with. And it's been one of the real pleasant surprises for me. Every Monday, I go and I meet with the qadha and nahiya level officials, mainly on essential services. We're talking electricity, irrigation, fresh water. We're expanding now into education.

And these are -- I mean, these are college-educated, professional people that are very anxious to do their jobs, and all they need to do -- to do their jobs is security. And, you know, these areas that I mentioned, Arab Jabour, Abu Waitha, Hawr Rajab, quite frankly there's a statement to them, you know, because they've been insurgent strongholds for so long. And you bring them up, and like, "Well, we can't go in there."

So we have to fight through that, and literally what we have to do is take them out, meet them -- in some cases I've physically taken them out and shown them that, hey, it's changed, we now own this ground, we're living in it, and it's safe to work here. And we've had tremendous results doing that.

On the electricity front, for instance, Arab Jabour just this past week it now has street lights up and running for the first time in at least five years. And this is not the U.S./coalition people doing the work, this is Iraqis. This is the Rasheed (sp) assistant electricity manager that is doing the work. He's hiring local electricians. We've -- they've put in more than 5 kilometers of distribution lines throughout the AO. They want to do their jobs; they just want to be safe while they're doing it. And they're all chomping at the bit to kind of get back to work and do what they're trained to do. They just need a little -- you know, our help kind of hand-holding them at first. And this guy, we call him "Rod," the assistant electricity manager, he really impressed me. After a slow start, he really finished strong, and now we're going to take him -- we've already got -- he'll be -- (short audio break) -- Hawr Rajab here shortly, and then up into Abu Waitha as well.

Q A quick follow-up. You mentioned the (stigma ?) of the insurgency. What has been the response? Obviously, on these calls we hear a lot about that the biggest problem is the bottleneck between the GOI in Baghdad versus the provinces, and being able to get enough help and assistance and money flowing back and forth. What's the situation on that score?

COL. KENNEDY: Yeah, you're exactly right. I mean, that's the issue is we still have to provide the money in most cases, not in all cases. As they can get, you know, those spigots turned on from the government up in Baghdad flowing down into these technocrats at the qadha and nahiya levels, they're going to be well on the way to success over here. That's the -- to me, that would be the one area that, you know, it still needs to be figured out.

So I think -- I think those would be my comments on that.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any follow-up questions?

Q Yes, sticking on that -- Colonel, Andrew Lubin again from the Military Observer. On the GOI out of Baghdad -- (inaudible) -- covering themselves with glory, how's the provincial people, how's the local government doing?

COL. KENNEDY: Well, we deal mainly down at the local council level. We're starting, you know, at the grass roots. Over in Arab Jabour they're doing tremendously well. They've got a brand-new governance center, which is set to open this week, and they've got a well-functioning local council where they have subcommittees formed; by that I mean primarily essential services -- electrical, irrigation, agriculture, education. And they have selected who they want to represent them. In this case, it would be in the Rashid district.

So we are in the process -- actually, we're sending -- just tomorrow we're sending that local council up into Baghdad to receive formal training on how to be an effective governing body, and that'll be about five days up there in the -- up in Baghdad. So that on the next step -- and we've already spoken extensively with the district leadership, the district chairmen, and they're on board with recognizing two members off the local council.

So that's kind of the way we're doing it, it's from the bottom- up. And for the most part, these are -- you know, they're serious people, you know, realizing that there's serious work to be done, and they want to be a part of the future for their people. You know, they're good, honest Iraqis.

MR. HOLT: Go ahead.

Q A quick follow-up on the one point that it's almost kind of amazing that we didn't spend much time even talking about the security situation when literally a year ago we would have only been focused on that. But could you touch a little bit about the CLCs, the integration, their level of competence, what the feeling is on the street as far as the security forces and their performance?

COL. KENNEDY: Well, again, over in Arab Jabour it's tremendous. I mean, I was -- again, I was a brigade transition team chief two years ago, and that was a Corps 1, Tier 1 IED hotspot, the main route into Arab Jabour. I mean, it was -- that route was black. You did not go down there without a route clearance team. You couldn't even, you know, do military operations without that route being cleared due to all the deep-buried IEDs and whatnot.

And the CLCs are -- along with the great work that our soldiers have done -- are responsible for cleaning that area up, and you know, every day it seems like they find more caches and bring more UXOs and explosives in, which are less IEDs that are killing our -- potentially killing our soldiers.

So they are all in Arab Jabour. They wear road guard vests, they're well-organized. They have a good system for paying them, and they're well-disciplined.

Hawr Rajab, not quite as far along, but they do well over there, too, and it's really amazing in such a short of period of time -- we've only been here since June; you know, none of this was in existence this summer -- and to see how far they've come in short a period of time really -- has really turned the tide, in my opinion.

MR. HOLT: All right. Any other follow-ups?

Q Sorry, somebody else is on.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Who else joined us? (No audible response.) All right.

Q Colonel, Andrew Lubin again. Are you -- is your area pacified enough where you can go out without a flak and a helmet?

COL. KENNEDY: You probably could, but we don't. It's just, you know, who we are. We're -- shoot, we wear this stuff back in the rear at home station when we're training. It's just part of good military discipline. But -- you know, I have not been shot at while I've been here. So I would personally feel comfortable doing it, but we -- it's just not something that we do. You know, it is still -- a lethal enemy is still out there, and they still, you know, want to thwart our efforts to help the good people in Iraq. So we always have to maintain our vigilance and be on our guard.

Q Okay. Is your enemy out there, such as it is, are they more Sunnis, more Sunni insurgents or are they more JAM -- more -- (inaudible) -- oriented?

COL. KENNEDY: I don't know that I would categorize them one way or the other. I think probably they're just, you know, dead-enders that are just trying to wreak havoc, and I wouldn't quite know how to categorize it one way or the other. I'm more focused on the nonlethal aspects of things right now.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Lieutenant Colonel Kennedy --

Q Hey, Jack, I've got one quick follow-up, if you don't mind.

MR. HOLT: Oh, sure. Yeah, go ahead, (Red ?).

Q Sir, the butcher you're talking about, is that the one President Bush said that in June he only sold one or two a month and now he's selling one or two a day? Sheep?

COL. KENNEDY: That's exactly right. As a matter of fact, I was -- talked with him, and he's now up to slaughtering cows, too. Q Wow. Wow.

COL. KENNEDY: So he does sheep, he averages about five sheep a day, and then he does cows on Wednesdays and Fridays, also. So.

Q And you think that restaurant by this summer is a realistic goal?

COL. KENNEDY: Well, I think if we give him some assistance on the monetary side. I mean, this is a serious guy. He's a natural leader. He's older. You know, he's probably in his late 40s. He's a respected member within his tribe and within the community. And my sense with him is if -- you know, the money that we provide to him he's going to use wisely. So. Of course, we'll make him provide us a business model and make sure he gets the appropriate training, but yeah, I think that would be in the realm of the possible.

Q And what type of restaurant would it be? What would he make? What would he cook? I haven't eaten there. What's a popular dish?

COL. KENNEDY: His vision is to -- you know, to have 15 employees, where he has a grill, and he is slaughtering, you know, whether it be a sheep, a goat or a cow, and that's what's on the menu for that day.

Q Gotcha.

COL. KENNEDY: What's kind of funny is, right before he told me that, I was talking to another shopkeeper and he said, "You know what we really need in this area now that things are kind of settled down is a restaurant, a place for people to come together, for families to come together and just kind of relax and, you know, smoke and talk and be normal people." He's in tune with the citizens there in his AO.

Q One last question if you don't mind. How many troops or individuals do you have on your EPRT? How many people are working in that area, civilian and military?

COL. KENNEDY: Well, we've got three dedicated civilians. We've got a State Department rep who's our leader, Mr. John Smith. We've got an ag rep who's, I would say, the best USDA rep in Iraq, Mr. Mike Stevens (sp). And then Mr. Bruce Bailey is our (AID/aid ?) guy. So he works primarily training for us. So three civilians, and then I'm the military deputy. And then I use a lot of my staff to flesh it out. So, you know, six to eight total.

Q Okay, great. Great. Thank you, sir.

Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Lieutenant Colonel Kennedy, thank you for joining us for the bloggers roundtable today. Lieutenant Colonel David Kennedy with us this morning, commander of the 2-3 Brigade Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

Thank you, sir.

Any final thoughts or closing comments for you?

COL. KENNEDY: Yeah, I sure do. I just want to thank all of you for taking your time to participate, and it's always a great opportunity to get the word out on all of the encouraging things that we see happening on the ground every day. But more important is to realize the magnificent things that our soldiers are doing every day out on the ground as they continue to fight against this lethal enemy who's determined to stop our efforts to help the Iraqi people.

We'll continue to push hard every day that we're here to build the capacity for the Iraqi economy and local government and to improve the infrastructure for the Iraqi people. It's very humbling to witness the history that is unfolding here in Iraq and a privilege to be a part of it.

And a final, thank you for what you do in support of our efforts.

MR. HOLT: All right. Lieutenant Colonel David Kennedy, thank you very much for joining us, sir.

Q Yeah, Colonel, thank you for the time.

COL. KENNEDY: You're welcome.

END.